CREATING RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE CLD STUDENTS

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Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by
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Abstract

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a mindset for teachers to organize instruction and bring flexibility in teaching. This project presents a PDF document, in hard copy and an online format, containing easy-to-follow guidance for teachers to access how-to and strategies to differentiate engagement of ESL and /or CLD students in class.

CRT encourages CR teachers to learn about a variety of cultural features. Also, CRT emphasizes the importance of going through an introspective process to identify culturally implicit bias. When considering the human process of learning, it is necessary to understand the cultural background of the learner as well as the processes that undergo in our brains, and that give explanation to how students and teachers interact inside and outside a classroom. This approach encourages teachers to have a wider perception of how culture influences how we learn and what we consider as relevant. CRT calls for students to have ownership of their leaning process by being aware of their unique style of information processing.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family who has encouraged and supported me throughout my graduation studies. To my mom Nancy and my dad Gustavo who worked so hard to provide access to education. To my sisters Carolina, Jimena and Manuela, who have always been an example of hard work and sisterhood. To Jeremy, who did not allow me to give up.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Plaisance for going beyond the administrative task and provide human support and understanding. Also, I like to thank professor Paula Wilder for her dedication, patience, detailed feedback, and support throughout my thesis writing process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students whose first language is other than English and who have limited English proficiency (LEP) are an increasing population in the United States. According to data presented by the National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition (NCELA) in 2008, the percentage of English language learners (ELLs) between 1995 and 2005 was far higher than the school population growth itself (105% and 12% respectively). Also, and despite that the 2018 high school enrollment percentage was below the 2005 level, the ELL percentage still represents about 30% of the population (U.S Census Bureau, 2020).

Today's demographic in U.S schools sets teachers facing a complex reality of being responsible for educating an expanding student community in classroom context consisting of different languages, levels of schooling, and cultural backgrounds. Despite these factors, the community is held accountable to the same standards as any other regular American student. Teachers need to prepare a culturally and linguistically diverse population to be competitive and productive in an everyday more globalized era (Herrera & Murry, 2016). This response should come with more equity than equality (Herrera & Murry, 2016), which means that each student is unique and that granting high-quality education to each of them implies acknowledging their assets and needs using resources, teaching methods, and learning opportunities that are responsive, differential, and as unique as they are.

Having the opportunity to get involved in the U.S. school system as a teacher of Spanish as foreign and heritage language, and after 10 years of being an English foreign language (EFL) teacher in my home country, I am aware of the call for more and better prepared teachers to meet the need for differentiated instructions helping those who are becoming less a minority in our classrooms and constituting a bigger figure in our schools' enrollment numbers. Thus, a common story among Spanish heritage teachers is that their Hispanic students (English learners and non-English learners as well) reach out to them looking for help developing assignments from other subjects, mostly assignments from core subjects. My personal experience is not foreign to this reality. Students normally indicate that despite all the core class teacher's efforts, the vocabulary used was completely unknown for them, or that they are unable so far to relate it to what they have learned in their home country before coming to the USA.

In the high school where I work, teachers have the best of intentions, but communication on the matter of culturally responsive teaching, among those involved and in contact with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners, (English second language (ESL) teachers, foreign languages teachers, and core classes teachers) is very limited due to a shortage of time, and a lack of knowledge / preparation on how to adapt lesson plans to CLD students' needs; I have researched more about what it takes to build a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) classroom context to accomplish the main goal of this project which is to create an easy-to-follow guidance document for teachers containing the how to, and strategies to differentiate the way they engage ESL and/or CLD students in class. Knowing second language (L2) teaching strategies and working effectively with CLD students seems to be explained extensively just to foreign language teachers but briefly in other teaching education programs (Hammond, 2015). It is important for the teaching-learning process in the 21st century classrooms to be based on how the human brain learns (cognition and higher order thinking) joined to a culturally responsive pedagogy (social emotional aspects) (Hammond, 2015).

The completion of this project also aims to inspire my colleagues and other teacher outside my workplace to get involved in the CRT approach that they may have already heard about but do not feel confident enough to add to their daily teaching practice. This would help to lower the rate of failures in CLD students. While I am aware that CRT is not the only factor influencing CLD students' success in high school, I believe that it is a relevant factor influencing their performance.

Chapter 2: Literary Review

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) pedagogy is neither a step-by-step guide for creating lesson plans nor a magical wand to fix every student's academic issue. It is an approach that allows teachers to bring flexibility to their teaching, and further students' "information processing" by building relationships of trust and safe learning environments" (Hammond, 2015, p. 15). As with any approach, mastering comes with practicing and continuing learning; this chapter starts with information on the achievement gap (Anderson et al., 2007), which is the issue that CRT aims to give an answer to. Then the chapter will provide information on Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking skills and the benefits of achieving higher order thinking skills. Next, there is a discussion of the importance of learning about the elements that intervene in the learning process. The cultural element at different levels together with the brain's neuroplasticity attribute are CRT pillars that help CLD students become self-directed and independent learners (Hammond, 2015).

The Achievement Gap

Charles Payne (2008) noted in his book called *So Much Reform and So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools* that reforms in education do not always result in changes or improvements. Reforms are created based on the believe that every school context is equal and that issues can be solved by applying the same county/state/nationwide strategy (Payne, 2008). However, evidence shows that there are notorious disparities in state or national test scores, dropout rates, high school/college completion rates and other success measures that historically have been creating and widening achievement gaps between African American and

White students but more recently including CLD students from various backgrounds like Latinos and Asians in the United States (Anderson et al., 2007; Hammond, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2001). Oakes' (2005) classroom studies documented that the achievement gap is related to the educational tendency to lower expectations for CLD students. Offering only repetitive curricula only results in more dependent learners who are able to repeat by memory facts and data but are not able to work at their full potential (Hammond, 2015). The intellect needs to be appropriately challenged or prepared for how to learn, to analyze, to solve problems creatively, or in other words, to do with higher order thinking skills (Hammond 2015). Consequently, dependent learners, once reaching high school age, are more prone to being disruptive in class, and getting off-task (Alexander, 2012). In addition, dependent learners are often labeled as defiant due to the increasing frustration of not being able to keep up with the academic level established by the Common Core State Standards, and therefore, more prone to become incarcerated (Alexander, 2012).

The achievement gap is the aftermath of underestimating CLD student's cognitive skills. Consequently, CLD students are not being offered analytical tasks that lead them to process information effectively leading to self-directed learners (Hamond, 2015). When teachers do not further the activation of advanced cognitive skills in the classroom, students begin to struggle (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Jackson, 2011) and their brainpower does not grow (Ritchhart, 2002). In order for CLD students to become leaders of their own lives, they need to find a way out of the achievement gap by developing analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills to process information effectively. Although behavioral problems are likely to appear when opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills are denied, CRT approach is a powerful tool to close the achievement gap and is an answer to build intellective competence (Gordon, 2001) leading to reduced disruptions in the classroom.

Higher Order Thinking Skills

The original work *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* written by Benjamin Bloom and his collaborators Max Englehart, Edward Furst, Walter Hill, and David Krathwohl that was published in 1956, along with its revision titled *A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Anderson et al., 2001) have been use for decades in education to help teachers establish learning goals, design lesson plans with organized objectives and appropriated instruction as well as assess students' progress according to the six hierarchical categories of cognitive processes commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy (Armstrong, 2010). The newest version of Bloom's Taxonomy uses verbs instead of nouns to refer to six different order of thinking skills that build on each level below. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) as well as the original help to bring a common language into the educational field to communicate among teachers and create curriculum. In Bloom's taxonomy, intellectual behavior is classified into six orders or levels of thinking. The goal is to help students move up through this taxonomy of thinking skills. At the bottom level, "Remembering" is the starting point that goes all the way up through "Understand" "Apply" "Analyze" "Evaluate" until reaching the "Create" level at the top (or in the older language: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation) (Anderson et al., 2001).

According to Brookhart (2010), there are three different terms in which higher order thinking skills can be defined. First, higher order thinking skills can be defined in terms of transfer (Brookhart, 2010) since students' journeys begin at retaining information, continue at making sense of what they retain and ends when they learn how to use that information in different contexts. Therefore, students learn what to do with the information stored in their brains when they find themselves in a context that is new or differs from the context they initially learned the information from. They learn to transfer what they know to the unknown (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001 as cited in Brookhart, 2010, p. 63).

Secondly, Brookhart (2010) referred to higher order thinking skills defined in terms of critical thinking. This definition is related to the capability of judging or reasonably reflecting on the information available in order to make well-thought-out decisions. Critical thinking involves being able to decide whether to give credence to a source or not, identifying what biases are behind points of view (Brookhart, 2010). Moreover, Conklin (2012) illustrated that creative thinking is as important as critical thinking in the development of higher order thinking skills. Creativity should be encouraged in every student since inventing would involve synthetizing and creating the top two high order thinking skills (Jacobs 2010).

Additionally, Brookhart (2010) defined higher order thinking skills in terms of problem solving. As problems do not come with instructional booklets on how to solve them, coming up with solutions requires all the thinking skills from recalling information to creating strategies to meet the goal of solving the problem (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007). Daily life situations call for effective and efficient solutions to close-ended problems like using a mathematical formula to find the area of a triangle (there is just one answer possible), or open-ended problems like planning a budget (different correct answers are possible) (Brookhart, 2010).

Academic rigor.

Any academic institution pursues the goal of helping students to succeed in school and become productive adult members of the society by making them active users of the higher order thinking skills from Bloom's Taxonomy. To meet this goal, academic rigor must be involved (Conklin, 2012). Nevertheless, in educational field, rigor needs to be understood as the provision of learning environments where students are immersed in challenging, stimulating, and engaging lessons demanding creativity, thinking critically, and understanding of complex concepts (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Academic rigorous content engages students at emotional and personal levels, and withholding rigor from CLD students is part of the achievement gap and is part of the schools' failure (Strong et al., 2001). Conklin (2005) stated that students develop and make use of higher order thinking skills every time they are faced with rigorous content; however, the quality of the encounter is more important than quantity (Conklin, 2012).

Culture

To be culturally responsive teachers, educators need to start by building awareness of their own culture as well as their CLD students' cultures (Hammond, 2015). Understanding CLD students' realities through the lens of their socio-political truths and their culture consciousness pilots the way to avoid lowering teachers' expectations for CLD students' performance or downplaying the knowledge CLD students bring to the classroom (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017).

Throughout history, many have tried to establish a definition of culture. For some, culture is those characteristics and products belonging to literate, well educated people (Arnolds, 1867 as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012). For some others, culture is part of every person considering that we are all part of a social group; however, culture is complex, and varies from one person to another depending on their evolutionary development (Tyler, 1870, as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Another point is that culture relates to “what people believe, what people do, and what people make and use” (Perogy & Boyle, 2017, p. 12). Most of the definitions agree on the fact that culture is complex and that culture shapes the way people perceive the world around them (Hammond, 2015). Culture is the window frame throughout which there is interaction with the outside world, -the clarity of the glass, the colors on the landscape, what is considered beautiful, safe or welcoming as well as what is considered unpleasant, insecure, or uninviting (Gay, 2000). Each of these elements mutates from one individual to another. Even though nations can be largely inhabited by one social group, there are diverse cultural traits among the members of the group who are affected by their geographical location, the resources available, age (different generations), etc (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Similarly, there is diversity among members of a social group sharing the same race or ethnicity (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). CRT invites teachers to see cultural differences as assets enriching the classroom environment and the best path to follow to take advantage of the differences is to get to understand culture and its elements (Herrera & Murry, 2016). CLD students are typically labelled as slow readers or culturally deficient, but in reality CLD students are bringing multilingualism to every classroom, providing the opportunity to gain knowledge of various cultures through allowing CLD students to share their firsthand experiences (Herrera & Murry, 2016).

Levels of culture.

It is desirable here to be aware of the three layers, levels, or surfaces upon which culture operates. Culture can be taught in national, local, institutional, group and individual terms, but even within the levels of observable culture another level contains values and norms, and there is a deeper level that contains the underlying, unconscious assumptions (Spencer-Oatey, 2012; Hammond, 2015).

The observable or surface level of culture consists of the artifacts and concrete elements like celebrations, cuisine, dances, music, dress codes, among others. According to Hammond (2015), this level of culture barely emotionally charges the individual. In this level, it is easy to witness how different groups set up their environments (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Even so, at this point the how in a social group is clear, there is need to go beyond to the shallow level of culture to know more about the why behind the observable phenomena (Hammond, 2015). This shallow level shows those rules that do not need to be written to be followed. Rules including the way elders are addressed, the means of interacting with others, the concepts of privacy, the appropriate approach to establish eye contact or not, and other actions that are driven by deep cultural values. Also it is important to notice that “Individuals are greatly emotionally charged at this level” (Hammond, 2015, p. 22)..

The last and deeper of the three levels of culture is the level where the unconscious, underlying assumptions exist. At this deeper level, culture dictates what is right or wrong, good or bad, and as Hammond (2015) indicated, individuals are intensely emotionally charged in this level. Underlying assumptions lead to judging whether an environment is safe or if it triggers survival responses in the brain. It is at this level that CR teachers start evaluating themselves and their culture (Hammond, 2015). The evaluation includes what actions are categorized or interpreted as misbehavior, defiance, or lack of respect that could be considered as a positive behavior in CLD students’ culture and even rewarded by their social groups leaders when such behavior is repetitive (Gonzalez et all., 2011).

Cultural patterns.

The immigration phenomena has turned the United States into a melting pot, which is a common place where many people from different countries and cultures blend together and are assimilated (Cruz & Berson, 2001). However, in CRT, teachers are able to identify the cultural patterns across the various cultures interacting every day inside their classrooms. Identifying the cultural patterns that are shared at a deep level is the key starting point to understanding how students' brains are driven by their own culture (Gay, 2000).

Different cultures can bring different patterns into context. There could be collectivist oriented and individualist oriented students in the same class (Hammond, 2015). Even though cultures create community, there are communities that tend to prize the features that belong to individualism (individual success, self-reliance, independent reading and studying, competitiveness), which contrasts with communities that privilege features belonging to collectivism (group and independent success, group reliance, group interaction and learning, being collaborative) (Hofstede et all., 2010). There are other such patterns or archetypes, such as ones related to how knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the other, either on paper or verbally (Hammond, 2015). Nonetheless, the oral and written traditions, as well as the individualistic and collectivistic patterns of cultures play an important role in how students behave, learn, and interact with others. Therefore, building awareness of these archetypes is part of the success of the implementation of CRT, and hence, the success of CLD students at school (Hollie, 2017).

Neuroplasticity

The design of the human brain evidence that it is set up to learning. As long as it is exposed to stimulus, goals and a safe learning environment, knowledge is acquired (Wilhelm, 2010). Providing the human brain with challenging ideas helps stretch students' ways of culturally interpreting the world around them so that neurons can fire and wire together to grow gray matter, allowing for the development of the learning process. Examples of this predisposition are, among others, the fact that people develop oral and written language. In addition, the fact that humans learn to read even though we are not born with a specific brain area for such tasks demonstrate plasticity (Doidge, 2007) In order for CRT to support this natural feature of the human brain, CR teachers need to know how the brain works to take better advantage of its plasticity and capacity of growing in unimaginable ways (Hamond, 2015; Wilhelm, 2010). The different wrinkles that are physically visible in the brain are the paths built by gray matter produced when new knowledge is acquired. Long term learning and the mastering of higher order thinking skills comes when the learning experience is arranged in such a way that it successfully surpasses the three interdependent layers of the brain architecture: The Reptilian region, the Limbic region, and the Neocortex region (Hammond, 2015).

Reptilian region.

This region of the brain derives its name from the fact that it is commonly found in reptiles. This region is in charge of being on the watch for any signal of danger so that the body will promptly react to find safety or will allow the body to relax if a safe environment is detected. This region of the brain never sleeps and is the region that keeps us alive (Hammond, 2015). In this region of the brain lies the reticular activating system (RAS). The RAS tells the body if there is a situation around us that implies a reaction of any of the “four Fs:" flight, fight, freeze, or reproduce (Walsh, 2010). Thus, students’ attention at the beginning of the class depends on keeping the RAS in our students’ brain comfortable (Hammond, 2015). Providing an enjoyable and welcoming environment is a key to a good start in the classroom setting where a culture of respect is cultivated (Hammond, 2015; Walsh, 2010; Wilhelm, 2010).

Limbic region.

The limbic region is from the bottom to the top and is the second layer of the brain. It is also called early mammalian since it is a region shared with cats and dogs (Walsh, 2010). This region stores emotions, behavior, and memory (Zull, 2002). It is also where students record and judge learning experiences as positive or negative as “it creates our internal schema that acts as our background knowledge” (Hammond, 2015, p. 38). The limbic region consists of three structures creating memories and emotions. The thalamus is the intercom receiving information from the RAS and sending it to the part of the brain that specifically processes that particular information. The Hippocampus is our memory data bank. It can store memories for a short term of 5 to 20 seconds (neurons fired). If information is relevant or attractive enough or connected to some previous knowledge, it is moved to what Hammond (2015) has called the working memory where information is stored for about 20 minutes. Hammond (2015) also noted that once the concept learned becomes something meaningful and relevant for the learner, it is moved to the long-term memory. It is very important not to forget about the amygdala which is in charge of interpreting what the RAS reads and sends through the thalamus and releases either the stress hormone cortisol or the stress-free hormone serotonin. CRT approach aims to avoid the production of cortisol. Releasing the cortisol hormone holds the other cognitive functions captive, and the brain stops learning, creating, and being able to solve problems (Hammond, 2015).

The Neocortex region.

The neocortex "functions as language, abstraction, planning and logical thought" region (Walsh, 2010). This region is the manager of our imagination and working memory and is responsible for the development of the intellective capacity by wiring and rewiring itself (Hammond, 2015). Even though the neocortex loses a certain amount of its ability to wire and rewire after childhood, with the correct practice and stimulus, it is still possible to continue its development during adulthood (Wilhelm, 2010). Because paths are created when neurons wire together, but when not in use, they can also be pruned from our brain, it is crucial to put into practice the new knowledge as much as possible. Practicing until the brain realizes that it is important and needs to be stored as background knowledge to be used in the future (Medina, 2008).

Conclusion

As we learn more about how the brain functions and develops alongside how culture affects learning within this development, there is an obvious need for more CRT in schools within the United States. In our classrooms, CLD students deserve well-trained CR teachers to lead them in their learning process. Therefore, information to raise awareness and an understanding of CRT needs to be made more accessible to teachers, principals, and school administrators in a document that summarizes CRT in order to transmit its implementation in a more efficient and effective manner.

Chapter 3: Project Design

In this chapter, I explain the rationale behind creating a handbook mainly for teachers of core classes who struggle in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and English language learning (ELL) students. The manual contains easy-to-follow guidance for teachers to access how-to and strategies to differentiate the engagement of ESL/CLD students in class. This document will assist teachers in creating a culturally responsive mindset that will be pivotal to their classroom environment. Also, this document will help teachers to organize instructional time based on how the brain learns. The ultimate goal in education is to drive students into being productive citizens who are able to analyze, creatively solve problems, and learn more every day (Anderson et al., 2001). Teachers will be able to actively engage students in their learning process by using the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach as a means of connecting learners to higher-order thinking skills.

Year after year, the number of CLD students in public schools in the United States is increasing, but there is an achievement gap between CLD students and students from the predominant culture (Payne, 2008). Educators tend to lower expectations for CLD students, underestimating CLD students' cognitive skills based on perceived cultural differences as deficits. Therefore, there is an urgent call for more and better-prepared teachers to meet CLD students' needs. Teachers need to become aware that students' success comes with acknowledging diversity in the classroom as an asset instead of a liability.

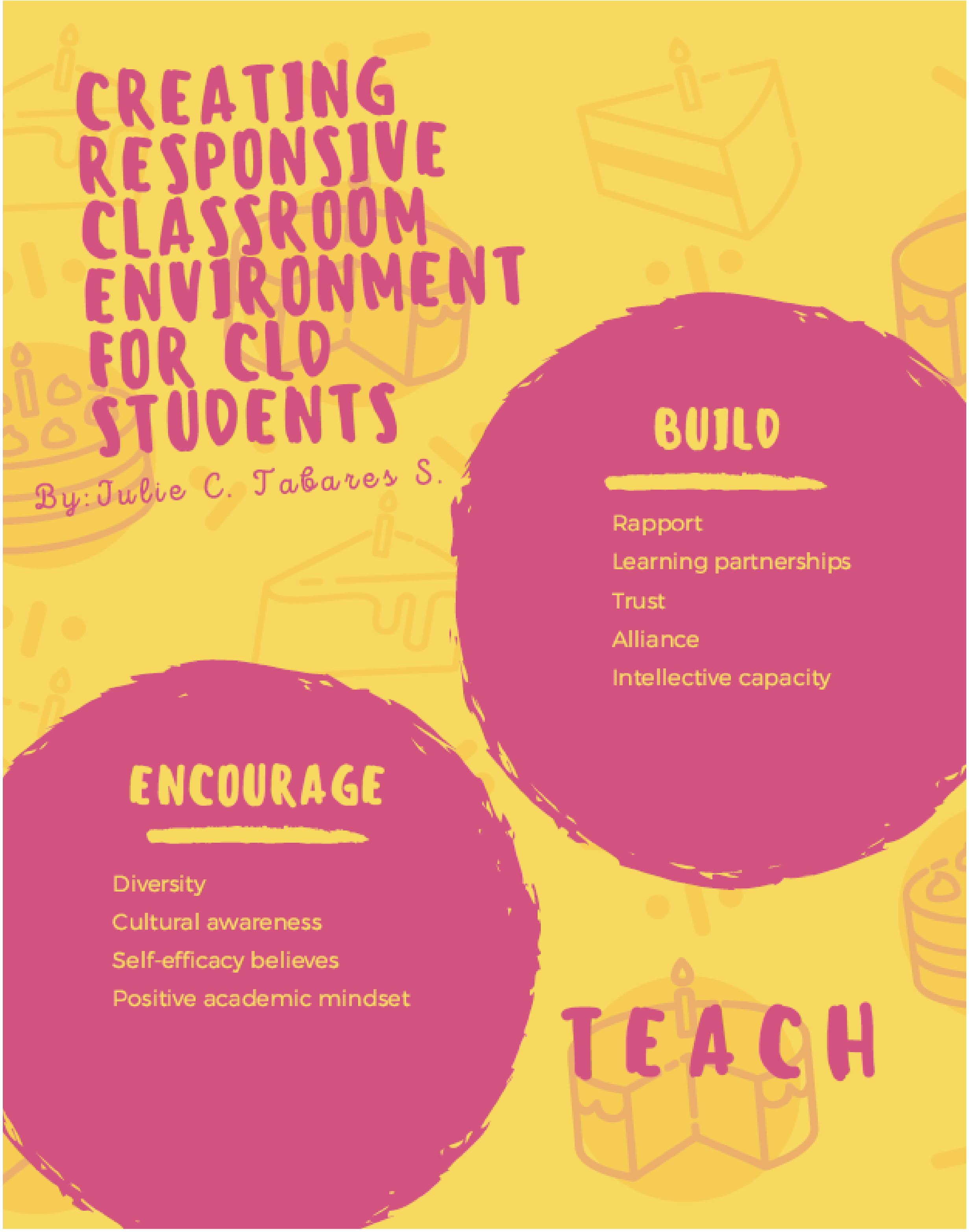
CTR approach has become an answer for closing such gaps and meeting such needs (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2015). The implementation of the CRT approach supports teachers in achievement of their goal of leading students to move from dependent to independent learning.

The CRT approach offers teachers the opportunity to understand how the processes in our brains affect our learning times and how our culture affects our learning styles and perceptions. For example, while U.S. teachers perceive it as a sign of disrespect when a student addresses them by their first name, a Colombian student may do it [not intending to be rude] since, in the Colombian culture, it is a good practice. CRT demands teachers to be aware of these cultural traits that help create rapport between students and teachers. As a side effect, cultural awareness reduces unnecessary student time spent at the principal's office due to a misunderstanding.

On the one hand, the CRT approach has become essential to understand what adopting a culturally responsive approach requires. The CRT approach is more than hanging culturally related artifacts on the classroom walls, using Latino/Asian/African names in the wording of math problems, or knowing a few sentences in the students' native language. CRT requires taking the time to get to know students' personalities, sociopolitical realities, thinking processes, and the how and why of their culture. On the other hand, the CRT approach triggers students' ownership of their learning by constantly going through processes of making their mental process visible and immersed in an inviting but rigorous academic environment.

The final product of this project is a PDF document (hard copy and online format) divided into four sections explaining the different stages of becoming a CR teacher. The first section is called *awareness*; the second section is called *learning partnerships;* the third section is called *information processing*, and the fourth and last section is called *the community of learners and the learning environment*. These four sections provide core class teachers with information about how and why to adopt the CRT approach to their teaching. Teachers will learn about the importance of pausing during the development of the class and its connection to acquiring new knowledge. Likewise, teachers will witness how basing their class planning on the CRT approach benefits the whole classroom population by leading them to be a community that trusts and supports each other.

Chapter 4: The project



CREATING RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR CLD STUDENTS

By: Julie C. Tabares S.

BUILD

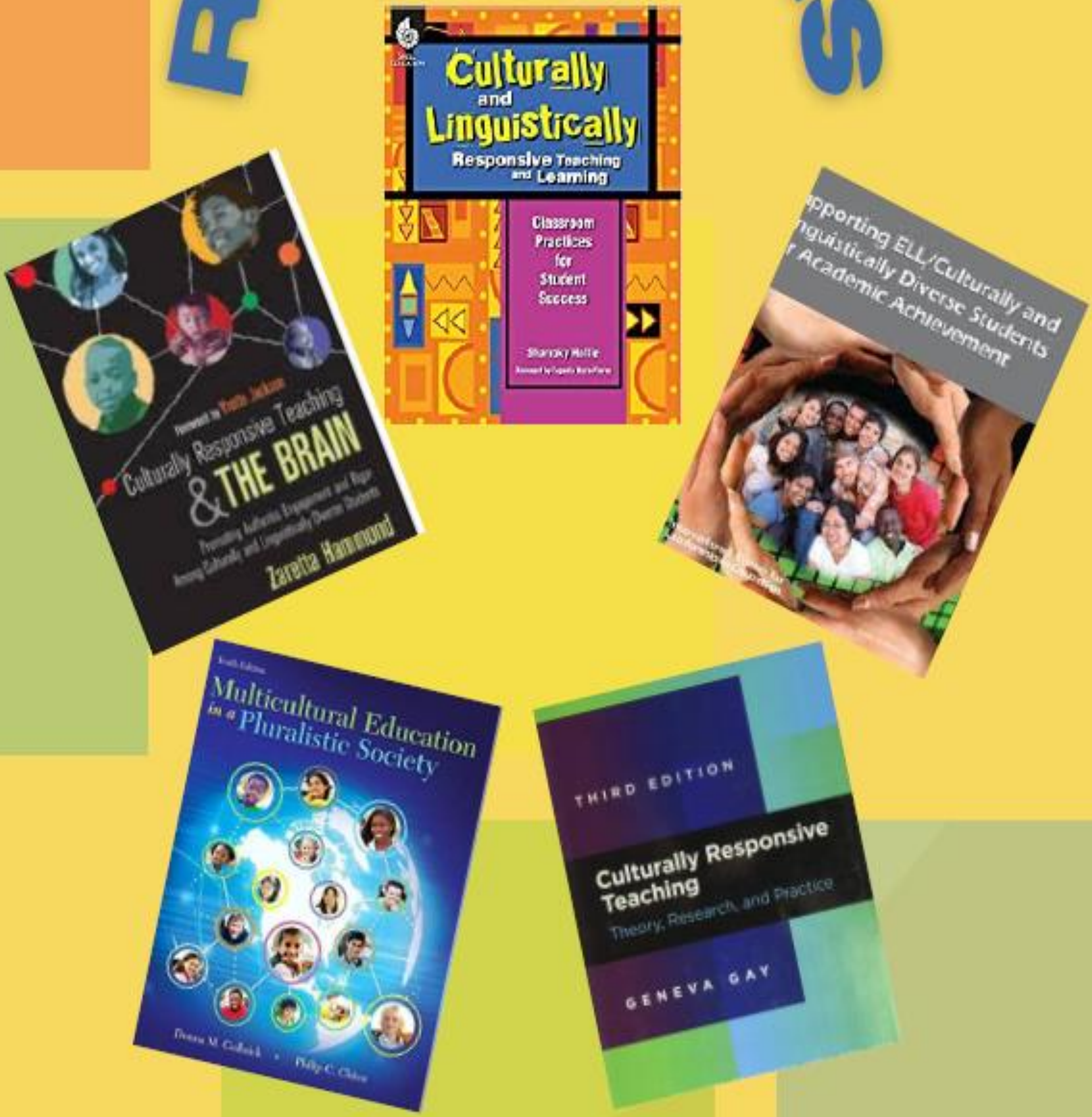
- Rapport
- Learning partnerships
- Trust
- Alliance
- Intellective capacity

ENCOURAGE

- Diversity
- Cultural awareness
- Self-efficacy believes
- Positive academic mindset

TEACH

RESOURCES



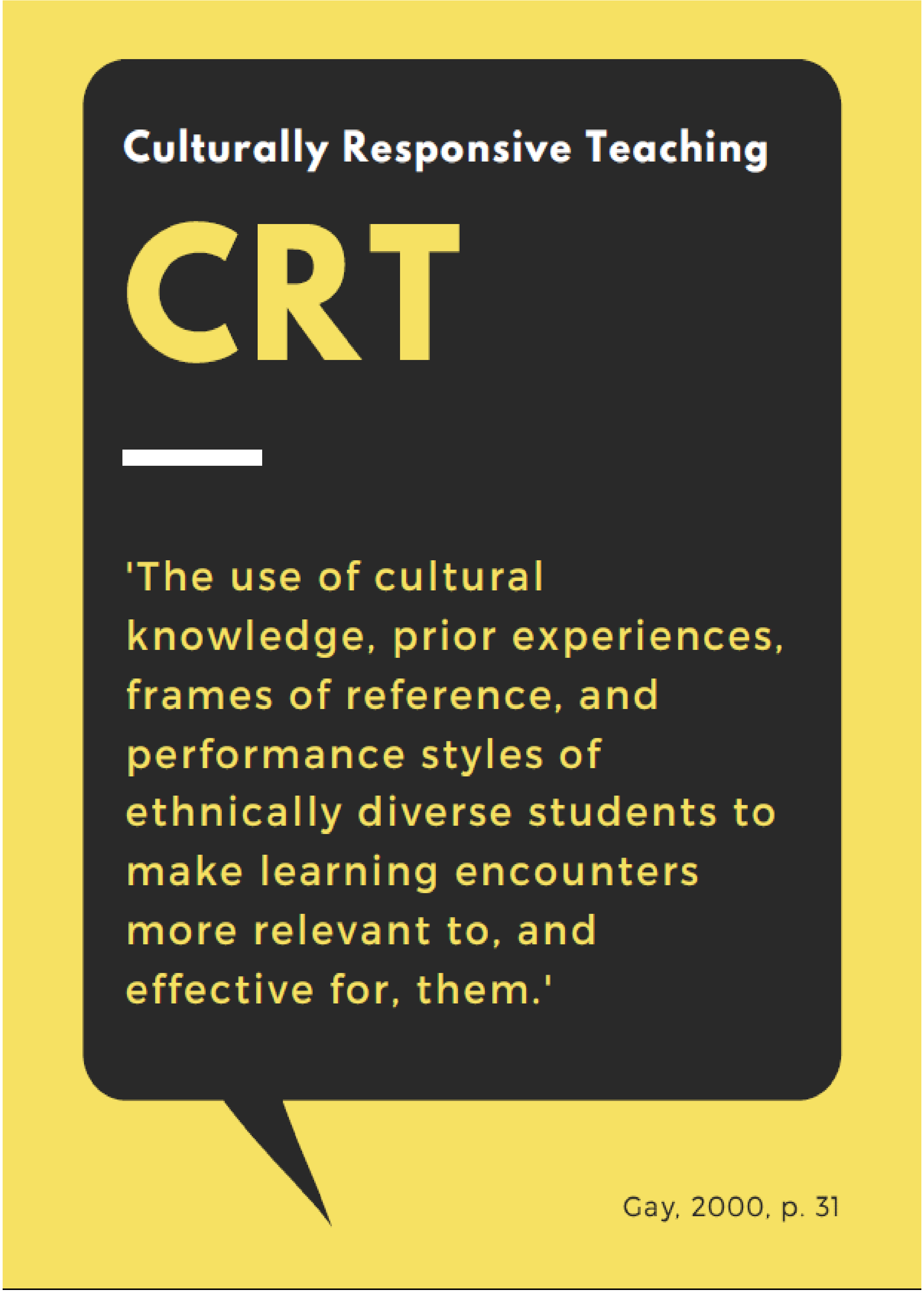
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning
Classroom Practices for Student Success
Sharroky Hollie

Foreword by Yvette Jackson
Culturally Responsive Teaching & THE BRAIN
Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students
Zaretta Hammond

pporting ELL/Culturally and
nguistically Diverse Students
r Academic Achievement

Tenth Edition
Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society
Donna M. Gollnick • Philip C. Chinn

THIRD EDITION
Culturally Responsive Teaching
Theory, Research, and Practice
GENEVA GAY

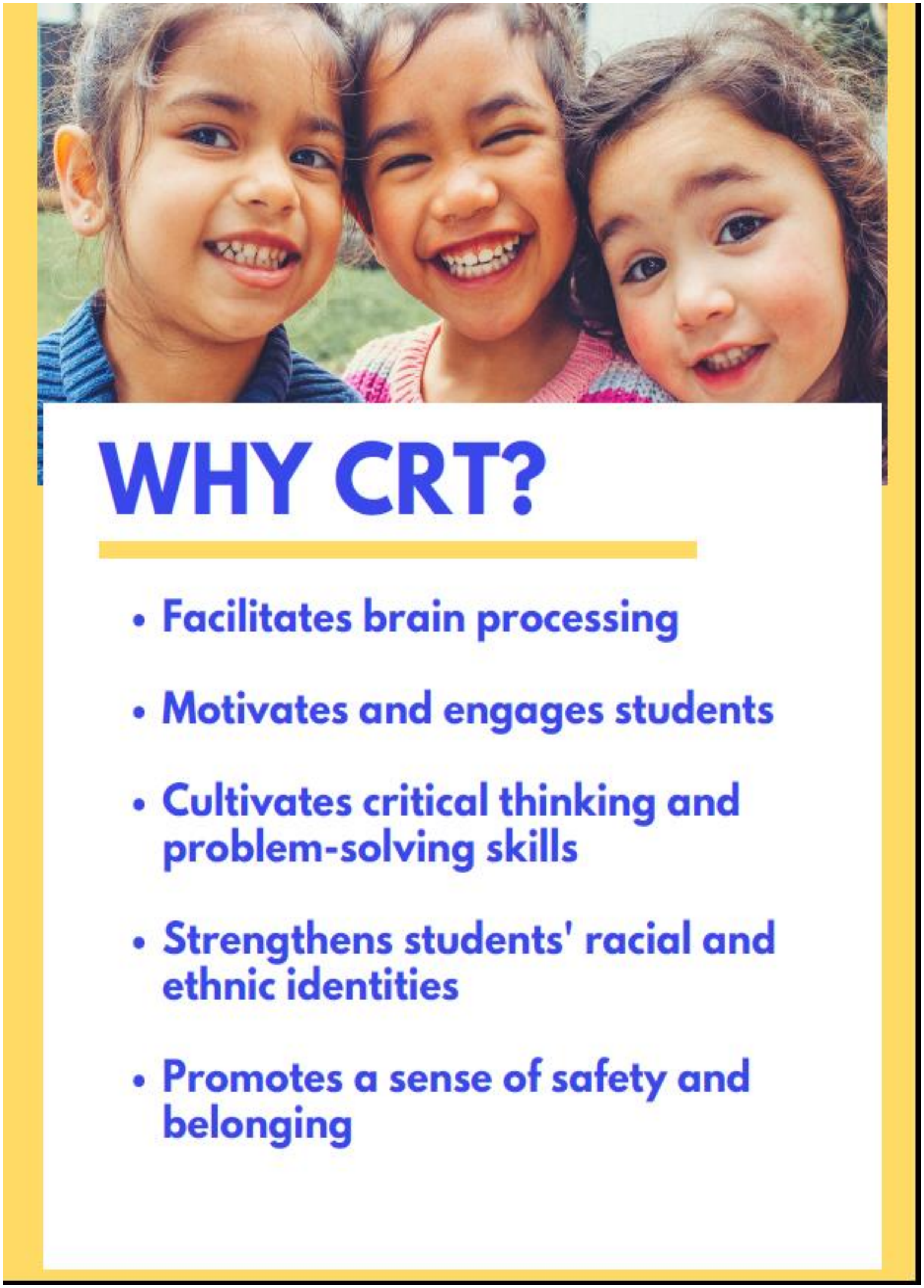


Culturally Responsive Teaching

CRT

'The use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for, them.'

Gay, 2000, p. 31



WHY CRT?

- Facilitates brain processing
- Motivates and engages students
- Cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Strengthens students' racial and ethnic identities
- Promotes a sense of safety and belonging

STAGES

AWARENESS

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

INFORMATION PROCESSING

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

AWARENESS
CULTURE

TAKE YOUR TIME TO LEARN

THE FIRST STEP to becoming a CR teacher is to learn about the concept of culture and what it has to do with learning.

> Most of the definitions of culture agree on the fact that culture is complex and that culture shapes the way people perceive the world around them (Hammond, 2015)

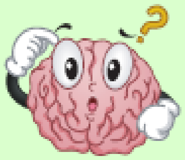
3 levels of culture

There is an observable or **surface** level of culture that consists of artifacts and concrete elements like celebrations, cuisine, dances, music, and dress codes.

(Spencer-Oatey, 2012: Hammond, 2015)

AWARENESS

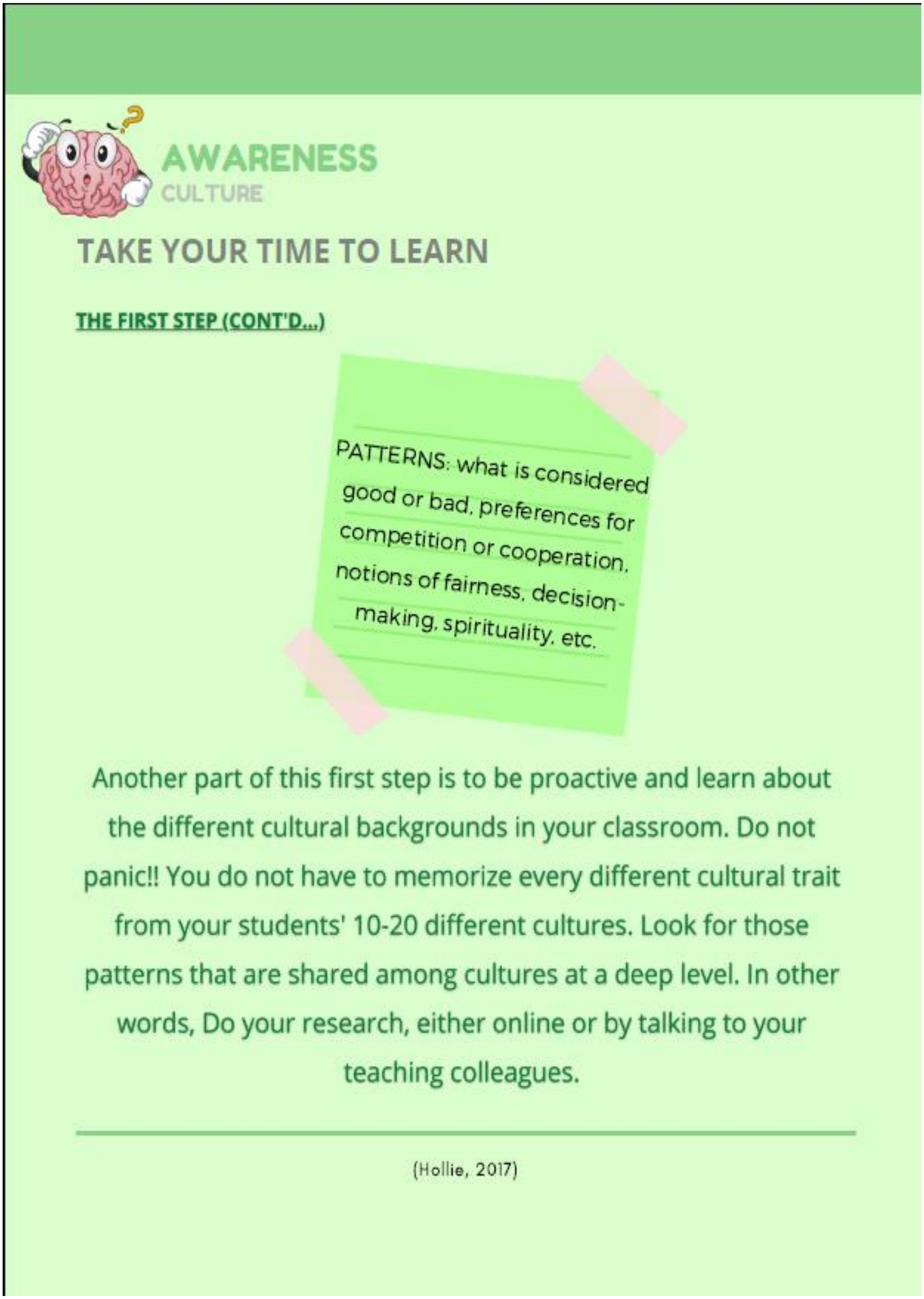
CULTURE



Following is the **shallow** level of culture. Here we find the why's behind the observable phenomena. This level shows those rules that do not need to be written. This includes the way elders are addressed, interacting with others, the concepts of privacy, the appropriate approach to establish eye contact or not, and other actions driven by "deep cultural values."

The last of the three levels is the **deep** level of culture is the level where lie the unconscious, underlying assumptions. Here it is where culture dictates what is right or wrong, good or bad.

(Spencer-Oatey, 2012: Hammond, 2015)



AWARENESS
CULTURE

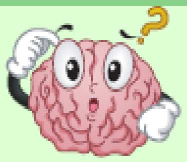
TAKE YOUR TIME TO LEARN

THE FIRST STEP (CONT'D...)

PATTERNS: what is considered good or bad, preferences for competition or cooperation, notions of fairness, decision-making, spirituality, etc.

Another part of this first step is to be proactive and learn about the different cultural backgrounds in your classroom. Do not panic!! You do not have to memorize every different cultural trait from your students' 10-20 different cultures. Look for those patterns that are shared among cultures at a deep level. In other words, Do your research, either online or by talking to your teaching colleagues.

(Hollie, 2017)

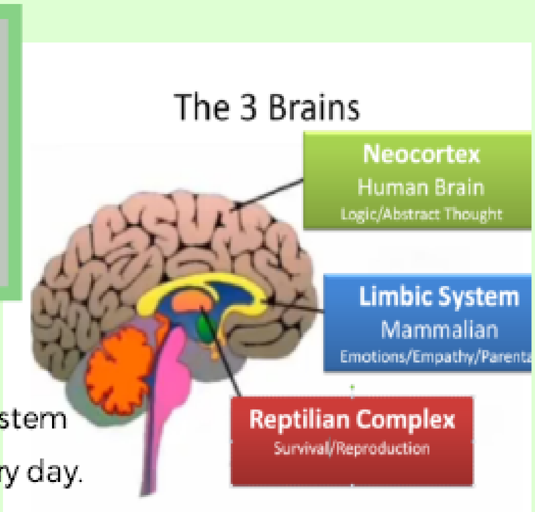


AWARENESS

YOUR BRAIN ON CULTURE

THE SECOND STEP is to learn how the brain learns.

Understanding the brain's physical structure is key to establish a foundation for CRT. The brain is developed in a three-layer architecture. Each layer is built on top of the previous one, and they operate in a synchronized dance.

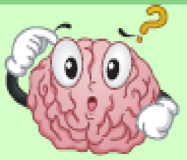


REPTILIAN REGION: its main function is to keep our body alive. A reticular activation system (RAS) watches our surroundings all day, every day. Appealing to this region helps to catch learners' attention at the beginning of a task.

LIMBIC REGION: its main function is to help us learn from experience, manage emotions and remember. It also houses three important structures:

- The Thalamus: in charge of being the communication dispatcher between the RAS and other parts of the brain doing additional processing.
- The Hippocampus: in charge of our memory at different terms. **After** 5-20 seconds, **short-term memory**, if the topic is not interesting enough, attention move on to something else. After up to 20 minutes, the **working memory** needs checking for understanding time so that that information can be store in the **long-term memory** that helps us make sense of the world.

(Hammond, 2015; Walsh, 2010; Wilhelm, 2010).



AWARENESS

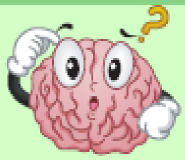
YOUR BRAIN ON CULTURE

(LIMBIC REGION contd...)

- The Amygdala: is in charge of setting our body in the fight, flight, or freeze mode. It does not need to go through the Thalamus supervision if it considers what we are in imminent danger. Once the amygdala hijacks our brain by releasing **cortisol** (the stress hormone), all other cognitive functions stop for about 20 minutes. Cortisol, however, stays in the body for up to 3 hours. (Zull, 2002).

NEOCORTEX REGION: its main function is to be the commander center of the brain. Our brainpower is built here in the neocortex once filtering through the two previous regions. **The neuroplasticity** or endless capacity of the brain to learn and rewire itself is evident in this region. Having wrinkles in this region is good. Every time a neural pathway is started and revisited in time, the brain grows more gray matter (neurons) and folds into itself. (Medina, 2008)

The brain wrinkles represent the person's capacity to do complex thinking and problem solving

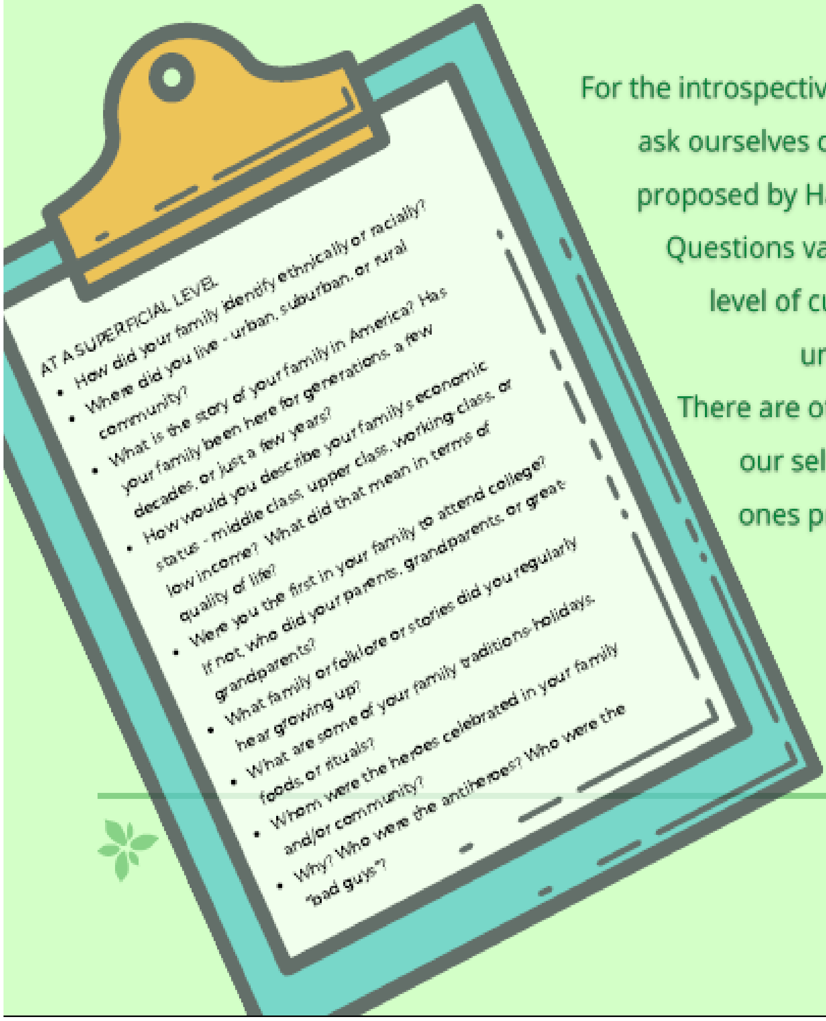


AWARENESS

PREPARING YOURSELF FOR CRT

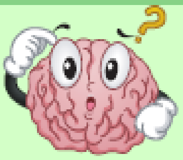
THE THIRD STEP to creating a culturally responsive classroom is to recognize our implicit bias, which means those evaluations or believes, whether positive or negative, that can exist without even realizing it. It is important to understand that we teachers are also cultural beings (Marshall, 2002). Mapping our cultural reference points at the surface, shallow and deep levels of our own culture, is necessary. The goal is to eliminate a deficit perspective and bring a shift in our mindsets.

For the introspective exercise, we need to ask ourselves questions like the ones proposed by Hammond (2010, p. 57). Questions vary depending on what level of culture, we are trying to unpack our implicit bias. There are other tools available for our self-examination like the ones provided by the Kirwan Institute and Harvard.



AT A SUPERFICIAL LEVEL

- How did your family identify ethnically or racially?
- Where did you live - urban, suburban, or rural community?
- What is the story of your family in America? Has your family been here for generations, a few decades, or just a few years?
- How would you describe your family's economic status - middle class, upper class, working class, or low income? What did that mean in terms of quality of life?
- Were you the first in your family to attend college? If not, who did your parents, grandparents, or great grandparents?
- What family or folklore or stories did you regularly hear growing up?
- What are some of your family traditions holidays, foods or rituals?
- Whom were the heroes celebrated in your family and/or community?
- Why? Who were the antiheroes? Who were the "bad guys"?



AWARENESS

PREPARING YOURSELF FOR CRT

THE THIRD STEP (contd...)

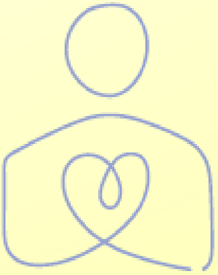
After analyzing ourselves as cultural beings, it is time to **widen our perspective; it** is time to broaden our explanations and interpretations of students' actions that look different from our own. A three-part process to carry on with this internal protocol:

1-Description: it is neutral, acts like a video camera. Just describe what you see.

2-Interpretation: consider possible culturally based interpretations for you students' behavior

3-Evaluation: assigned a positive or negative significance to the behaviour

(Gay, 2000).



LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

CARING: a major pillar of CRT

When the school is viewed as a factory, curriculum coverage and standard testing to classify students are the pillars of schooling. CRT sees building relationships at the same level of curriculum. Building relationships are not secondary to the teaching practice but a key ingredient for CLD students to succeed. A caring teacher does not accept failure; instead, a caring teacher works towards high expectations. A caring interpersonal relationship is demanding yet patient, persistent, validating, and empowering for the partakers. Authentic care about who our students are, what they say and feel is how we get students to open up and share.

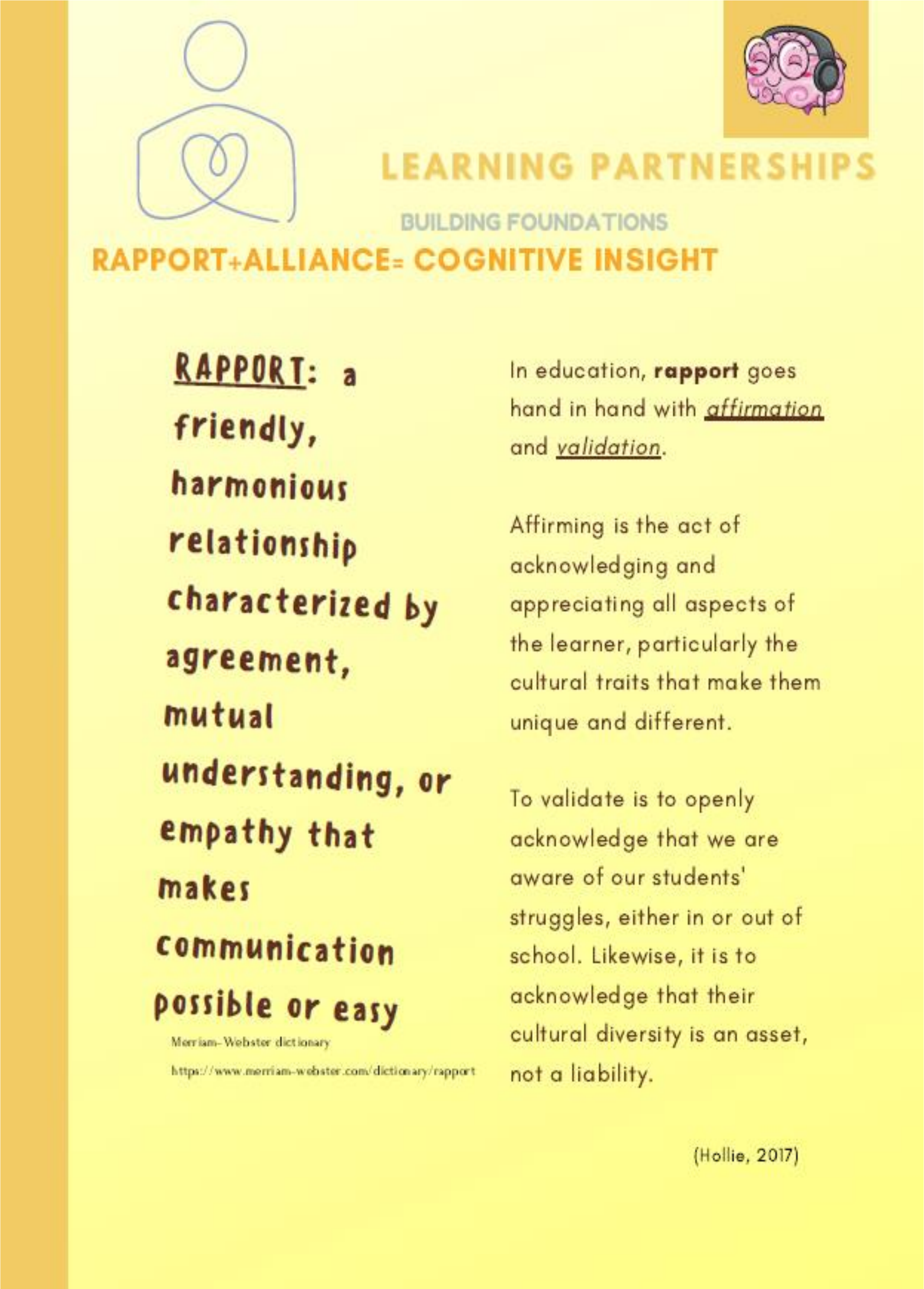
Carin is the way that we generate the **trust** that builds a relationship. Trust is what binds educational relationships between teachers and students.

(Gay, 2000).

TRUST

frees up the brain for other activities such as creativity, learning, and higher order thinking

(Hammond, 2015)



LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

RAPPORT+ALLIANCE= COGNITIVE INSIGHT

RAPPORT: a friendly, harmonious relationship characterized by agreement, mutual understanding, or empathy that makes communication possible or easy

Merriam-Webster dictionary

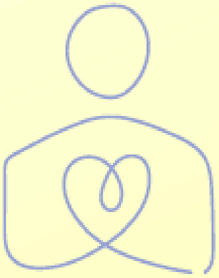
https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rapport

In education, **rapport** goes hand in hand with *affirmation* and *validation*.

Affirming is the act of acknowledging and appreciating all aspects of the learner, particularly the cultural traits that make them unique and different.

To validate is to openly acknowledge that we are aware of our students' struggles, either in or out of school. Likewise, it is to acknowledge that their cultural diversity is an asset, not a liability.

(Hollie, 2017)

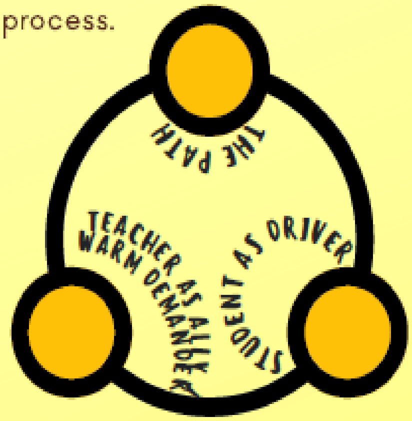


LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

RAPPORT+ALLIANCE= COGNITIVE INSIGHT

Now that you have created a sense of connectedness with the learners, it is time to use it to empower them. Empowering students by helping them develop a positive academic mindset. The path to becoming independent learners is arduous. Help at the beginning is necessary. The result will be learners responsible and owners of their own learning process. The **alliance** consists of supporting this change process.



ALLIANCE: a bond or connection between families, states, parties, or individuals / an association to further the common interests of the members

Merriam-Webster dictionary
https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alliance

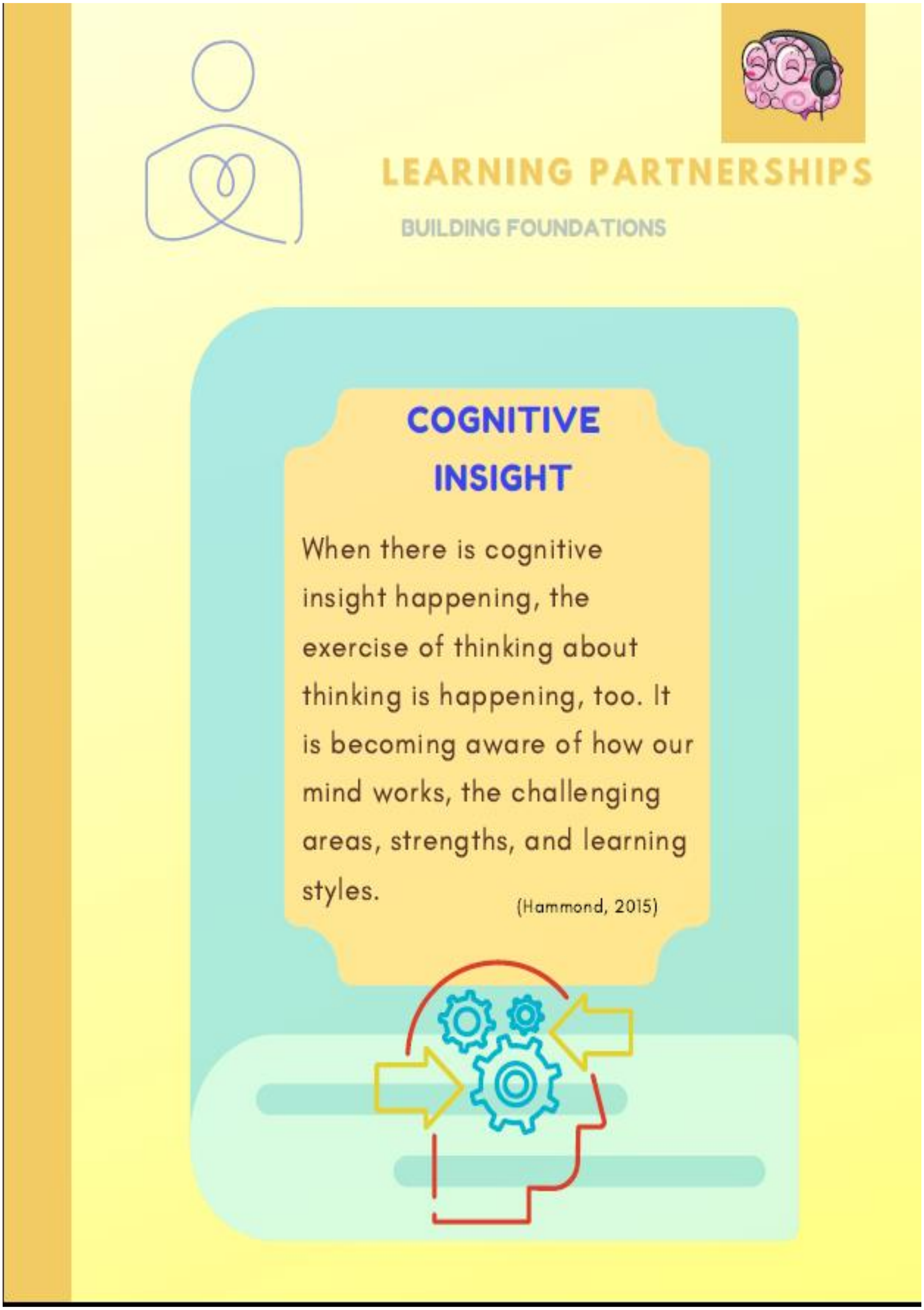
Three elements should intervene in this alliance:

The pact: a formal agreement between teacher and student.

The ally and warm demander: The role of the teacher is to offer both *care* and push.

The driver: The student's role is to be an active participant in achieving the learning goal.

(Hammond, 2015)



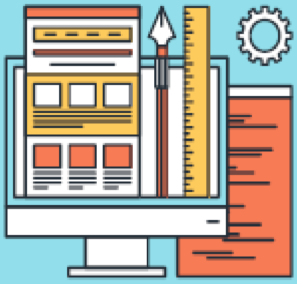
LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

COGNITIVE INSIGHT

When there is cognitive insight happening, the exercise of thinking about thinking is happening, too. It is becoming aware of how our mind works, the challenging areas, strengths, and learning styles.

(Hammond, 2015)



INFORMATION PROCESSING

GROWING BRAIN POWER

TEACHING LEARNERS HOW TO LEARN

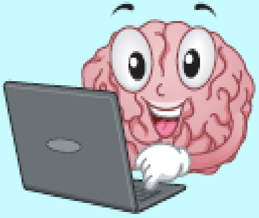
Strategies on how to process information and activities that are academically oriented will enrich the learners' background.

There are three stages in which information processing happens: *input, elaboration, application.*

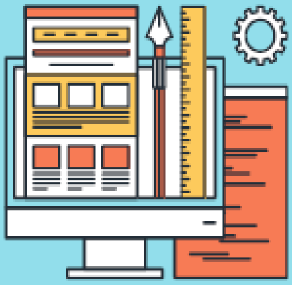
INPUT STAGE

At this stage, the brains decides to what to pay attention to. In just a range of 5 to 20 seconds, either the attention stays or moves on.

To begin with a lesson, teachers need to ***ignite*** the learners' brains. We need to use "*calls to action*" like call and response activities, playing music, read strongly emotional quotes, ask students to get involved in a challenge, a talk, etc. This triggering of the RAS will get the learners' attention, and it only takes 5 to 10 minutes.

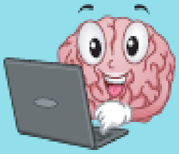


(Gonzalez et all, 2011; Hollie, 2017)



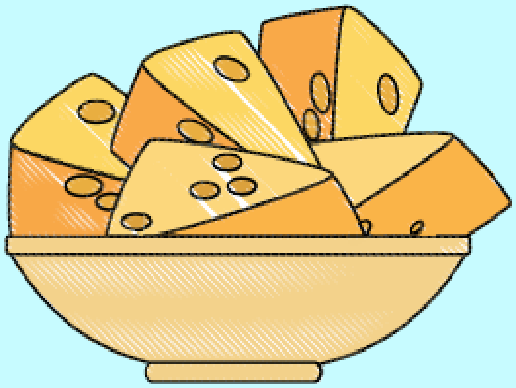
INFORMATION PROCESSING

GROWING BRAIN POWER

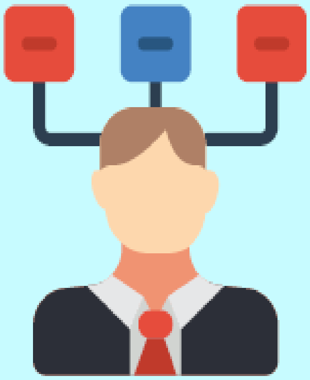


TEACHING LEARNERS HOW TO LEARN

ELABORATION STAGE

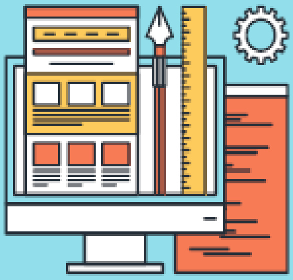


Chunk your lesson to make it digestible! Learning for understanding happens in this stage. During this stage, the brain uses the working memory that takes 5 to 20 minutes to process the information provided. On average, a student can process information for about 12 to 15 minutes, and then the brain will pause for near 10 minutes to "chew on" or process the information just learned. During those 10 minutes, students can be allowed to have unstructured thinking time and/or actively engage in **cognitive routines.**



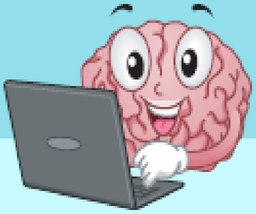
COGNITIVE ROUTINES are habits of mind to take full advantage of the cycling-down time of the working memory. The learner needs to be taught how to process information actively and connect it with their background knowledge. Allow time to process similarities and differences, whole-to-part organization, relationships, and perspectives of the new input. It is the key to expanding **intellective capacity.**

(Gay, 2000)



INFORMATION PROCESSING

GROWING BRAIN POWER



TEACHING LEARNERS HOW TO LEARN

APPLICATION STAGE

"*Use it, or lose it*" The brain needs to rehearse and repeat the new knowledge to store it in the **long-term memory.**

The first 24 hours are crucial in this process. Failing to practice or revisiting what has just been learned during the first following 24 hours would barely remember 30% of it.

Provide the learner with games, problem-solving scenarios, or projects to be developed in which the learners apply what they learned

(Hammond, 2015)

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Classroom, routines, rituals and opportunities.

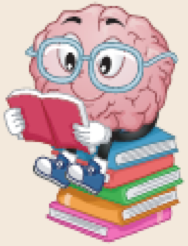
> **"Building a sense of community and connection in the classroom supports the social, emotional, and intellectual safety of all students" (Zaretta Hammond, 2010, p. 142)**

THE CLASSROOM: the classroom is an important element in CRT. It needs to reflect the values of trust, partnership, and the academic mindset we intend to build. Processes and structure need to probe that covering the lesson is not more important than caring for everyone's emotional well-being.
The classroom aesthetics and symbols should be in tune with the collectivistic cultural values of our students' culture. Authentic cultural elements help the classroom environment be a safe place where the learner explores his/her identity.

ROUTINES & RITUALS: *Routines* help learners know what is expected from them. They need to be taught, modeled, and reinforce until they become one with the class. *Rituals* such as reading quotes/articles or watching inspirational TED-TALK videos reinforce the community spirit of the class. It also nurtures the "I believe in my own capacity" feeling among students.

OPPORTUNITIES: regularly offer learners the opportunity to openly express their ideas about the classroom culture and the learning community. Similarly, provide learners with the opportunity to support each other in moving from being dependent learners toward independent learning.

(Gay, 2000)



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Chapter 5: Conclusions

The youngsters of today are the adults of tomorrow. Preparing them to be productive citizens is in the hands of educators. Development, creativity, innovation, and progress are impulse by independent learners. People who have improved their capacity to think critically, process information effectively, analyze, and create new wonders. Becoming an independent learner, also known as a user of higher-order thinking skills, needs to be taught in our classrooms. Thus, a whole chain of support needs to be activated to provide teachers with tools and instruments to qualifying them for such a task.

Today classrooms in the United States are populated with multiple personalities as well as multiple cultures. The challenge then is to equitably provide opportunities for students to grow in a culturally responsive environment. Implementing the CRT approach could better address the demands of teachers who struggle to meet the needs of CLD students. Similarly, the CRT approach benefits CLD students to identify learning strategies and create habits of mind that allow them to take on more advanced academic tasks (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

The research of this project helped me learn about the processes that undergo in the brain while learning. Those processes should be taken into account while planning instructional time to have a more productive outcome. I also had the opportunity to get more familiar with mainstream class teachers who are exceptionally knowledgeable in their fields but have concerns about teaching CLD students. I hope that the product of this project will help bring support for teachers bridging the achievement gap between CLD students and students from the predominant culture. This manual could be used as a reference guide to starting the journey of becoming a culturally responsive teacher.

Further work is needed in the area of the CRT approach implementation. This manual has to be the beginning of more extensive reading and creating PD sessions for teachers to acquire more knowledge about being culturally responsive to their CLD students. Adopting the CRT approach is a crucial change of mindset at helping CLD students to succeed.

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